



SPIRIT OF THE AGE
SERIES: NO. II. ROBERT
LOUIS STEVENSON: BY
E. BLANTYRE SIMPSON





AS ADVOCATE

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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E. BLANTYRE
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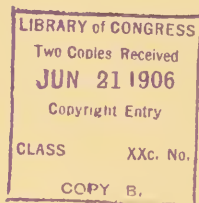


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ILLUSTRATIONS

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AS ADVOCATE

frontispiece ✓

AN EDINBURGH STUDENT

page thirty-two

THE TELLER OF TALES

page forty-eight

1892

*PORTRAIT PAINTED BY COUNT NERLI
IN SAMOA*

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page sixty-four

SPIRIT OF THE AGE SERIES

The publishers desire to announce that it is their purpose to comprise in this series a collection of little books uniform in general style and appearance to the present volume and having for their subjects men and women, whose work and influence, in whatever field of literature or art was their chosen one, may be said to faintly reflect the spirit or tendencies of cultivated thought at the present time.

The treatment of the subject matter will not be conventional, the chief aim being to present to the readers a living, marching personality breathing with the individuality characteristic of the person.

Volume I of this series is Whistler
by Haldane Macfall

Volume II, Robert Louis Stevenson
by Eve Blantyre Simpson

Additional volumes to be announced shortly.

“A spirit all sunshine, graceful from every gladness, useful because bright.”

Carlyle.



The mother of Robert Louis Stevenson, when asked to inscribe a motto on a guest list, wrote :—

“The world is so full of a number of things,

I am sure we should all be happy as kings.”

“That,” she said, “includes the whole gospel of R. L. S.”

These lines are certainly a concise statement of the spirit in which her son undertook to expound the benefits to be derived from “performing our petty round of irritating concerns and duties with laughter and kind faces.” Before he could walk steadily, it had been discovered

F O R E S I G H T S

he was heavily handicapped by the burden of ill-health. Still the good fairy who came to his christening endowed him with "sweet content," a gift which carried him triumphantly through all hampering difficulties. He never faltered in the task he set himself—the task of happiness. He began to preach his gospel as a child. He would not have his tawdry toy sword disparaged even by his father. "I tell you," he said, "the sword is of gold, the sheath of silver, and the boy who has it is quite contented." In the same manner he transformed a cod-dling shawl into a wrap fit for a soldier on a night march. To the end of his days he was eager to be happy. We are told

"Two men looked out from prison
bars ;

One saw mud, the other stars."

O F T H E M A N

When bodily ailments held Stevenson as a captive in bonds, his keen sight pierced through the obstructions which held him caged. We are not left in doubt, when we read his books, as to whether his gaze was earthwards or to heaven's distant lamps. He taught others to see with his clear vision, and he expounded his gospel in so taking a manner, even if the import of it had savoured more of mud than stars, it would have been studied for its style. He had the true artist soul within him. He wished to create or represent what came within the range of those brilliant dark eyes of his, so, with infinite care and effort, he strove to attune his words to the even cadence and harmony with which he wished to amaze

F O R E S I G H T S

us, for, as A. J. Balfour said, "he was a man of the finest and most delicate imagination, a style which, for grace and suppleness, for its power of being at once turned to any purpose which the author desired, has seldom been matched." It is difficult for those who knew him before he had, by pure hard work, won his way to fame, to realise how one physically so fragile, of so light-somely versatile and whimsical a nature, apparently so ready to be diverted from the main high-road by a desire to explore any brambly lane, had in him the deliberate goal-winning gait of the tortoise. His stubborn tenacity of purpose he owed to his antecedents. The Scot's inalienable prerogative of pedigree exercised an influence

O F T H E M A N

over him, though he appeared as a foreign ingraft upon his Scotch family tree. In his record of his father's kinsfolk, *A Family of Engineers*, and in many of his essays, he engages his readers' attention by confiding to them his own and his forebears' history. "I am a rogue at egotism myself; and to be plain, I have rarely or never liked any man who was not," he says.

This Benjamin of Edinburgh's literary sons, the youngest, not the least, was born in the very middle of last century, 1850. This babe, that was to do Edinburgh honour yet, had been named after his two grandfathers, Robert Lewis. He was a mixture of both, the inevitable result of their diverse qualities, which he inherited. The

F O R E S I G H T S

Robert (a name he was seldom known by in his youth) was from the Stevenson side. They were a race of men of sterling metal, who lit our Northern Lights, and from the besieging sea wrung footholds for harbours. From them Robert Louis Stevenson inherited that tenacity of purpose which made him write and rewrite chapters till his phrases concisely expressed his meaning, and toilsomely labour till his work was perfected. His minister grandfather he etched with the "Old Manse." All his mother's people, the Balfours, were of a sanguine, hopeful strain, retaining an elasticity of spirit which never lessened under the burden of years. Stevenson writes of "that wise youth, my uncle," who was a grey-bearded

O F T H E M A N

doctor when his nephew thus referred to him. So from the daughter of the Herd of Men at Colinton he inherited his perennial youthfulness. "He was ever the spirit of boyhood," says Barrie, "tugging at the skirts of this old world, and compelling it to come back and play."

It was well for the boy that his mother had gifted him with her hopeful nature, for his father had Celtic traits in his character, and was oppressed with a morbid sense of his own unworthiness. It is Carlyle who vouches for the fact "that wondrous is the strength of cheerfulness, altogether past calculation its power of endurance." Little store of bodily vigour had Robert Lewis; but with his buoyant, enthusiastic,

F O R E S I G H T S

inquisitive spirit he accomplished a strong man's task, "weaving his garlands when his mood was gay, mocking his sorrows with a solemn jest." This treasured only son, worshipped by his doting parents and his nurse, Alison Cunningham, who was a second mother to him, reports himself to have been a good child. He also says he had a covenanting childhood. In the mid-Victorian era, a stricter discipline reigned over nurseries in Scotland's capital than now. "The serviceable pause" in the week's work on Sunday was not without real benefits, for the children of these times, if sermons were long and the Sabbath devoid of toys, learned to sit still and to endure, and very useful lessons they were to R. L. S.

O F T H E M A N

and others. Despite being an extra model little soul, "eminently religious," he says, he was much like other children. His nurse tells how, during one of the many feverish, wakeful nights he suffered from, when he lay wearying for the carts coming (a sign to him of morning), she read to him for hours at his request the Bible. He fell asleep, soothed by her kind voice, to awake when the sun was bright on the window pane. Again he commanded, "Read to me, Cummie." "And what chapter would my laddie like?" she asked. "Why, it's daylight now," he answered; "I'm not afraid any longer; put away the Bible, and go on with Ballantyne's story." "I am one of the few people in the world who do not forget

F O R E S I G H T S

their own lives," he boasted. His *Garden of Verses* testifies to the truth of this statement. When he was a man over thirty, he bridged the gulf of years, and wrote of the golden days of childhood. Not only do the little people joy to hear his piping, but those who sit in the elders' seat hearken to these happy songs of merry cheer coming to them as echoes from the well-nigh forgotten past. His father often sat by his sick-bed, and beguiled his small son from fears and pains by tales "of ship-wreck on outlying iron skerries' pitiless breakers, and great sea-lights, clothed in language apt, droll and emphatic." His mother and Cummie read to him day and night. Thus early the instinct of authorship was fired within him.

O F T H E M A N

One evening the young Stevenson realised that the printed page was intelligible to him. It was as if a rock that barred his entrance into the cave of treasure had melted, or swung back at his command. Till then Louis had been keen, like other youngsters, on adopting many professions when he grew up. Soldiering, even in the Crimean War time, did not appeal to the girlishly gentle little chap, for, as he shrewdly remarked, he neither wanted to kill anybody nor be killed himself. When he learned to read, he saw before him all the rows of books which he was told had finer stirring stories in them than even those his father told him, and he resolved he, too, would be a maker of tales.

Those wide apart but penetrat-

F O R E S I G H T S

ing eyes of his had caught sight of an ideal guiding star to follow, viz., Literature. His juvenile ambition to be a "Leerie light the lamp" faded. To reach the gleam which had enamoured him, he knew he must build with care and patience, like his family of engineers, a tower to enclose or a ladder to reach to this will-o'-the-wisp which inveigled him upward. His mind teemed with ideas; but he saw he would have to serve an apprenticeship to learn to weave smoothly together the web of his fancy, till, in his verbal fabric, he had the charm of all the muses flowering in a single word. He describes to us how he became a skilled artificer with his pen, and how with obstinate persistence he taught himself

O F T H E M A N

daintiness of diction. In his first book of travels he mentions how the branch of a tree caught him, and the flooded Oise bereft him of his canoe. "On my tomb, if ever I have one," he wrote, "I mean to get these words inscribed, *He clung to his paddle.*" The paddle he chose was his pen. It was the motive power which forwarded him along the river of life, through shoals and rapids. When but a wee toddling bairn, he drew his nurse aside and commanded her to write, as he had a story to tell. He dictated to his mother, too, when a boy of six, an essay on Moses. As a housebound child, he had to amuse himself. Skelt's dramas were then his delight; but the life of every child is a prophecy for those

F O R E S I G H T S

who know how to interpret it. His mother was prescient, and fore-told her white-faced Louis had the light of genius in those windows of the soul—the eyes. “‘Talent,” she knew, “was the result of human labor and culture.” He dreamed, when but four, he “heard the noise of pens writing.” She took it and his childish “Songstries” he sung as an earnest of his future.

Louis’ father, despite being, like Dr. John Brown’s Rab, “fu’ o’ seriousness,” had odd whims, among others, an objection to schools and lessons, so he raised no objection to his son’s regulation school-days being intermittent. When barely in his teens, Stevenson was ordered South, and spent two winters abroad. He was a pu-

O F T H E M A N

pil at Edinburgh Academy for a few years. Andrew Lang was there at the same time ; but, he explains, the future Tusitala,— “ the lover of children, the teller of tales, giver of counsel, and dreams, a wonder, a world’s delight,” — and he did not meet there, for Louis was “ but a little whey-faced urchin, the despicable member of some lower class,” when his future brother author was “ an elderly boy of seventeen.” The pity was that the cosseted only son never rubbed against his compatriot children in the discipline of the play-fields, but in some of his summer holidays he tasted of the doubtful pleasures of lantern-bearing and other boyish “ glories of existence.”

When the lad was seventeen,

F O R E S I G H T S

his parents leased Swanston Cottage, which became their summer home, and a big factor in their boy's education. It is a spot peculiarly secluded, to be within sight and sound of Edinburgh, lying hidden in the lap of the hills, sheltered "frae nirly nippin' Eas'lan' breeze and haar o' seas." It was there Stevenson began deliberately to educate himself to become the Master Stylist—the "Virgil of prose" of his contemporaries. These Pentlands were to him always the hills of home. He lifted his eyes to them from the old manse of Colinton, when he played there in his grandfather's garden. He longingly, in gaps between the tall, grey houses, looked for their familiar outline when winter prisoned him in Auld Reekie.

O F T H E M A N

These pastoral hills, with their sweeps of heathy moorlands, appear from first to last in his works. Two of his initial Memories and Portraits depict his hill-folk neighbors, the Shepherd and the Gardener. It was at a church "atween the muckle Pentland's knees" that Archie Weir of Hermiston noted young Kirsty, and that same "little cruciform place" was the scene of his "*petit poème en prose*," where we can all spend a peaceful "Lowden Sabbath morning" with his "living Scotch" sounding in our ears. However far away Louis Stevenson roved, there was mirrored on the tablets of his memory his own country, its speech, its very atmosphere. He wrote a New Arabian Nights, but from the old (he tells us how his minis-

F O R E S I G H T S

ter grandfather envied him his first reading thereof) he had acquired the secret of the magic carpet, and could be transported at will from the tropics back to where the curlews and the plovers wailed and swooped above the whins and the heather on his hills of sheep.

STEVENSON'S APPRENTICESHIP



In his early days, Louis was sociable, pleased when he met compatriot children, ready to be dressed and go to parties. But after he left school, his mood changed. He had been completely sheltered from rebuffs, so, when he stood in the "palace porch of life," and the peculiar accents of his mind were jeered at, he, who had never tasted of a whipping, felt the smart of humankind, and suffered sorely from "maladies incident to only sons." In the "coiled perplexities of youth" he "sorrowed, sobbed, and feared"

S T E V E N S O N ' S

alone. Blackford's uncultured breast had been meet nurse for Sir Walter when he roamed a truant boy, but further south of the becastled capital, topmost Allermuir or steep Caerketton became the cradle of the next poet and master of Romance that Edinburgh reared. There, in woody folds of the hills, he found, as he said, "bright is the ring of words," and there he taught himself to be the right man to ring them. When Swanston became the Stevensons' summer home, the undisciplined Robert kicked with his fullest vigour against what he called the Bâstille of Civilisation and the bowing down before "the bestial Goddesses, Comfort and Respectability." He was loudly rebellious, and too impatient to follow the

APPRENTICESHIP

ordinary rules of life or the sage advice, "Jowk and let the jaw gae by."

An impression has arisen, because of his revolt in these years against convention and creeds, that he was thwarted and unappreciated in his home and its surroundings. On the contrary, he was at liberty to indulge his Bohemian tastes and do much as he listed. His father gave him a seemingly inadequate allowance. Yet Thomas Stevenson was not a miserly man. He begged his son to go to his tailor's, for he disapproved of the youth's scuffy, mountebankish appearance. He supplied him with an allowance for travel—in fact, R. L. S. had all his bills paid, and his own study in a very hospitable home. R. L. S. owned books, and

S T E V E N S O N ' S

jewels were the only things he felt tempted to buy. The £ 1 a month allowance, when he left school, raised soon after to £82 a year, was to keep the money from dropping out of that hole in the pocket of his ragged jacket, which never seemed to get sewed up. Books he had in plenty, but his parents naturally did not treat him to strings of flashing stones to wear over his shabby velvet coat, or twine round his battered straw hat. His money affairs, like the table of Weir of Hermiston, were likely all his life "just mismanaged." By the time he settled in Samoa, his literary earnings were thousands a year; and by then his quiet-living, hard-working father was dead, leaving an ample fortune. Still he seemed

APPRENTICESHIP

haunted by fear of lack of means.

Louis' love and admiration for his father was deep and sincere. At his home, when guests gathered round the engineer's table, the boy, with his eyes sparkling, listened to his father's "strange, humorous vein of talk," then glanced round with a smile of expectation to see how much others appreciated their host's well-told tales. "My father was always my dearest," he wrote. This was a high certificate of appreciation, when we remember he had the most devoted of mothers. It hurt the son to the quick to deal his "dearest" a staggering blow, and decline to follow his hereditary profession. Louis had tried to be an engineer. He liked the swing-

S T E V E N S O N ' S

ing, smoking seas on which they struggled for a site for sheltering masonry. As in the case of other Stevensons, the romance of the work was welcome to him, but the office stool frightened him. When the would-be author had refused to follow in his kinsmen's footsteps, he promised to study as an advocate to satisfy his father, who urged his son to follow a recognised profession. Owing to his easy-going schooling and lack of a settled course of study, the law classes were excellent training for the erratic, mercurial-notioned youth. Stevenson had the good fortune in 1869 to be elected a member of the Speculative, the famed Debating Society where Jeffrey first met Scott. There Stevenson en-



AN EDINBURGH STUDENT

APPRENTICESHIP

countered his contemporaries in years and social standing, his superiors in debate, and he, "the lean, ugly, idle, unpopular student," as he calls himself, enjoyed "its atmosphere of good-fellowship, its vivid and varied interests, its traditions of honourable labour and success." "Speculative evenings," says R. L. S., "form pretty salient milestones on our intellectual journey." He had gripped a deal of the foundations of his hereditary trade when seemingly but a consistent idler. He mastered the intricacies of law, and took to the abhorred office stool so as to learn the better the workings of its slow machinery. He tells us he only obtained the mastery of his pen by toiling faithfully, but inborn in him was the art

S T E V E N S O N ' S

of talking. Even as a petticoated child, we read he gesticulated to aid his glib tongue. W. E. Henley (whose acquaintance Louis made about 1875, and who helped Stevenson with his chary praise and frank criticism) says of his friend, "He radiates talk. He will discourse with you of morals, music, marbles, men, manners, metaphysics, medicine, mangold-wurzel, with equal insight into essentials and equal pregnancy and felicity of utterance."

Along with this ready affluence of speech, the youth had what good talkers often lack, viz., the patience to hearken to others. Stevenson shone best in what he called a little committee of talkers, though his father and he used to argue a question together for days ; but,

APPRENTICESHIP

in the Speculative, he had at first to be a listener. A candid fellow-member says, "I cannot remember that Stevenson was ever anything as a speaker. He was nervous and ineffective, and had no power of debate; but his papers were successful." In one of his essays, touching on this select assemblage, Louis sketches what the editor of the *History of the Speculative Society*, just published, calls "a little Dutch picture; it focuses in vivid colour the associations which rise in the memory at the name of the Spec.—the stately old room aglow with many candles, the books, the portraits, the pious commemoration of the dead,—famous men and our fathers that begat us." "Stevenson," Mr Dickson goes on to say, "is

S T E V E N S O N ' S

the most famous man of letters who has belonged to the Society since Scott. No more interesting personality has ever been of our number, and no one has in the public eye been more closely identified with the Society." "Oh, I do think the Spec. is about the best thing in Edinburgh," Louis exclaims, and twice he was President of the "worshipful society."

A contemporary of Stevenson's, Sheriff Guthrie, wrote in 1899, "I knew Louis first in the Speculative Society; second, as a fellow student in the University Law Classes; third, being called to the Scottish Bar about the same time as a brother-in-law; and last, as a friend with many interests in common. In the Speculative he spoke fre-

APPRENTICESHIP

quently, and read some papers. We recognised his brilliancy, and we delighted in his vivacity; but we misread the horoscope of his future. We voted him a light horseman, lacking two essentials for success—diligence and health. We wondered where he had got the deftness and rhythm of his style, not knowing that the labour out of which it was evoked was of itself sufficient to refute our estimate of his powers of work. As to his health, we forgot behind that slender, angular frame was not only a father's iron constitution and a mother's nervous vitality, but his own cheerful spirit and indomitable will." The Sheriff, in this letter to me, recalls several reminiscences of Stevenson—some in a playful

S T E V E N S O N ' S

or contrariwise vein, and another memory illustrates, he says, "the sweet reasonableness which mingled with his wayward Bohemianism"; but space does not allow me to quote more than how, "It seems but yesterday that I met Louis in the Parliament House, and said I heard he had got a case. And I seem to see the twinkle in his eye and the toss of his arms as he answered, 'Yes, my boy, you'll see how I'll stick in, now that I've tasted blood.' "

Louis' mother showed this friend, Mr. Guthrie, a succession of her boy's photographs, ending in wig and gown as an advocate. "That is what I call from Baby to Bar," she said; and then added, beginning with a smile, and ending with a

APPRENTICESHIP

break in her voice, "I said to Louis once that the next collection would be from Bar to Baronet, and he replied, 'It will be from Bar to Burial.'" Except at the "dear old Spec.," he mixed little his equals in Edinburgh. As a writer in *Blackwood* points out, at the period he had grown into swallow-tails, Edinburgh was by no means devoid of intellectual company, which even a famed Robert Louis need not have despised. But he abhorred constraint and codes of rules. He was a born adventurer and practical experimentist in life, and he explains he spent much of his time scraping acquaintance with all classes of men and womenkind. His insatiable curiosity made him thirst to taste of the bitter as

S T E V E N S O N ' S

well as the sweet, to be pricked by the thorn as well as smell the rose. He was quick to see the humorous side of a tale or episode, but he was tenderly sensitive to ridicule. When he appeared among his legal brothers-in-law in the Parliament House, a wit there among the unemployed advocates in the old hall called him the Gifted Boy. He winced under the laugh, and fled from "the interminable patter of legal feet." He had cultivated notoriety by his shabby dress and lank locks. He did not realise, as an American says, "If you look as if you had slept in your clothes most men will jump to the conclusion that you have, and you will never get to know them well enough to explain that your head is so

APPRENTICESHIP

full of noble thoughts that you haven't time to bother with the dandruff on your shoulders." In a corridor in the Parliament House, where the men called to the Bar keep open-mouthed boxes for documents to be slipped in, one bore on its plate the inscription R. L. Stevenson. When that alien-looking advocate with unsuspected gifts had cast off the wig and gown, and had busied himself for years filling up reams of paper with his thoughts and studies on people, places, and things, sightseers going through the Courts would be shown this unused box, which remained so empty while those around it of his old rivals at the Spec. were full, as they were scaling the heights which lead to titles and the

S T E V E N S O N ' S

Bench.

Stevenson wrote of Edinburgh and her climate in a carping spirit, nevertheless he accorded due praise to her unsurpassed beauty. "No place so brands a man," he declared; and, in his turn, Stevenson left his brand on the romantic city of his birth, for now no book on Scotland's capital is written without mention of the haunts and homes of that changeling-looking son of hers. The door-plate of 17 Heriot Row bore the inscription of R. L. Stevenson, Advocate. No blue-bag laden clerk dropped briefs then into its letter-box. In one of its sun-facing drawing-room windows there stood a big Australian vine, carefully tended and trained. It was behind it, in the far window,

APPRENTICESHIP

the eighteen-year-old lad sat when, in the winter's gloamin', Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin, calling on his mother, was startled by his voice joining in the conversation. The visitor says, "I listened in perplexity and amasement. Who was this son who talked as Charles Lamb wrote? this young Heine with the Scotch accent? When I came away the unseen converser came down with me to the front door to let me out. As he opened it, the light of the gas lamp outside ('For we are very lucky with a lamp before the door,' he says) fell on him, and I saw a slender, brown, long-haired lad, with great dark eyes, a brilliant smile, and a gentle, deprecating bend of the head. I asked him to come and see us. He

S T E V E N S O N ' S

said, 'Shall I come to-morrow?' " He called next day, for Louis grasped at anything or any person that he felt drawn to. He took part in their theatricals, but otherwise eschewed social functions in Edinburgh. An old friend of his father's asked him to come to fill a gap at his table, though his own son had informed him Louis never went to prearranged feasts. Louis himself replied to this invitation: "C. is textually correct, only there are exceptions everywhere to prove the rule. I do not hate dining at your house. At seven, on Wednesday, his temples wreathed with some appropriate garland, you will behold the victim come smiling to the altar." The last words are characteristic of his attitude

APPRENTICESHIP

when he was lured into society,—he went a willing victim, with no affectation of martyrdom. The few who met him in Edinburgh drawing-rooms found him prodigal of tongue, somewhat puzzling with his wholesale enthusiasms, absurd flights of fancy, theories he had to propound, and ever ready to change like a chameleon to tone with his surroundings. The spritish, fantastic youth impressed those he encountered, even when he was one of the unfledged eaglets hatched in the ancient eyrie of his precipitous city, whom Browning tells us are not counted “till there is a rush of wings, and lo! they are flown.” “What was so taking in him, and how is one to analyse that dazzling surface of

S T E V E N S O N ' S

pleasantry, that changeful, shining humour, wit, wisdom, recklessness, beneath which beat the most kind and tolerant of hearts? ” asks Andrew Lang. But not only through the magnetism of his personal presence did he attract even strangers, but through his pen has he held in thrall all the reading public who liked his work. “ He has put into his books a great deal of all that went to the making of his life,” wrote his cousin, “ though he had the art of confiding a good deal, but not telling everything.” It would have been interesting to see, if Stevenson had taken it into his elfin-locked head to learn to shine in debate, and, instead of incubating a budding Scott, as he said, “ the Spec.” had trained

APPRENTICESHIP

an able advocate, if the glamour of his personality would have extended to the judges, and made him, with his well-chosen words, a successful pleader. The boards of the Parliament House were too well worn a road for so tramp-blooded a man. The tune "Over the Hills and Far Away" was for ever humming in his head. He left the venerable city of his birth, which he vowed he must always think of as home, and steered a course on his way to fame "far ayont the muckle sea" which led him from the Bar to Burial.

ACROSS THE SEAS



As an advocate, Stevenson found ample time to pursue his chosen profession of letters, for, during the winters in Edinburgh, he wrote much, and gradually his essays, etc., appeared in magazines, and are now gathered into happily named volumes. He spent the long vacations, when the Courts had risen, abroad, mostly frequenting an artist-colony in Fontainebleau. At that time he was full of a project, in company with some congenial spirits, to form a peripatetic club, buy a barge, and glide leisurely through Europe by



TELLER OF TALES

ACROSS THE SEAS

calm waterways. He had gone yachting one summer with a sea-loving brother advocate up the west coast of Scotland. The memory of that trip inhabited his mind, and he made his hero, David Balfour, when "*Kidnapped*," sail by the self-same islands and seas. Louis was persuaded by his boating friend, the following season, to embark with him on a canoe trip through Belgium; and the log of that tour became immortalised as *An Inland Voyage*, Stevenson's first book. His travels did not end when he left his frail craft at Pontoise, for, returning to Gretz, on the skirts of Fontainebleau, he first met his future wife, and that led a few years later to his following her to San Francisco, when she was free to remarry.

A C R O S S

He crossed the Atlantic and America as an Emigrant. That mode of life proved too hard for him. He had sailed and paddled without hurt in his fleet and footless beast of burden, the *Arethusa*. In the ensuing year (1877), he travelled "*Through the Cevennes with a Donkey*," slept under starry skies, or camped in plumping rain. Often at home he buckled on his knapsack and tramped along the open road, but in these trips, as in his two longer outdoor journeys, he had the heavens above him. The Emigrant was crowded with his fellows, so Louis arrived sick and sorry on the other side of the Atlantic, where he had to support himself, having left his home against his father's wishes. The rising author

T H E S E A S

found his market value in America low-priced, and his curiosity as to how it felt to be ill and penniless was satisfied. After his marriage in 1880, Louis, his wife, and her son became "*Silverado Squatters*," which proved a happier venture, both for purse and constitution, than being an "*Amateur Emigrant*"; also, Mr Stevenson generously settled an income on his son.

In a perpetual pursuit of health, the writer and his hostages to fortune rambled from the snows of Switzerland to the vineyards of France, and finally settled for three years at Bournemouth. Stevenson's undermined health grew worse; but he laboured on at his work, from his sick bed. Some summers he spent in Scotland, and

A C R O S S

at Braemar wrote *Treasure Island*: then *Jekyll and Hyde* brought him notoriety. He was anxious to return to his Alma Mater, and be there a Professor of History. A house in the cup-like dell of Colinton, where every twig had a chorister, would have sheltered him from the purgatorial climate; and the College, like the Courts, allowed long vacations, spring and summer, to journey off to bask in the South. But this plan, like the barge one, came to naught, for he was not elected. The tales of tropic islands in the South Seas—"beautiful places green for ever, perfect climate, perfect shapes of men and women with red flowers in their hair and nothing to do but study oratory and etiquette, sit in the sun and

T H E S E A S

pick up the fruits as they fall,"—remained in his tenacious memory. A guest at his father's in 1874 spoke of them, and the young Stevenson had stored the description away in his mind, to be unearthed when he willed, as was his habit. When first he heard of those favored spots, he had two anchors which kept him bound to Edinburgh—his parents. The good engineer died in 1887; and the other anchor, his mother, he found could be lifted, and became the best of ballast. When he elected to become a world wanderer, she left her Edinburgh home and, without hesitation, went off with her son and his household when they turned their backs on Europe in 1887. Her journal to her sister tells of

A C R O S S

these travels “*From Saranac to Marquesas.*” She simply but racily describes their course, which ended in the cruise on the *Casco*. In her book we enjoy genuine glimpses of the author, not so much as the man who has written himself into fame, but her happy-tempered, hero-hearted, eager-minded boy, who for forty-five years was all the world to her. The invigorating cold of the Adirondacks had its drawbacks, as had Davos; and Stevenson, who, a few years before had felt the sharp pinch of poverty at San Francisco, now chartered from there a ship of his own, and sailed away out of the Golden Gate, on his South Sea Odyssey, to those islands he had heard of years before, little thinking, as he listened

T H E S E A S

“till he was sick with desire to go there,” that talk was to be as a sign-post to him where to travel to. “For Louis’ sake,” his mother explains in her racy journal letters, speaking of having chartered the *Casco*, “I can’t but be glad, for his heart has so long been set upon it, it must surely be good for his health to have such a desire granted.” Louis warned his mother years before she had a nomad for a son, but she had never objected, and sat knitting on deck, well content not to be “in turret pent,” but to go forth with the bright sword she had forged. “She adapted herself,” her brother says, “to her strange surroundings, went about barefoot, found no heat too great for her, and at an age when her sisters at home were

A C R O S S

old ladies, learnt to ride ! ”

After many wanderings through the warm ocean waters, with “green days in forest and blue days at sea,” the yachters finally saw Samoa, and to the author it was the El Dorado of his dreams. “When the *Casco* cast anchor,” he avers, “my soul went down with these moorings, whence no windless may extract nor any diver fish it up.” It was indeed a unique experience for one of the master workers of the world, one whose subtle mintage of words had made his readers his friends, to settle in an uttermost isle of the Pacific. He throve there, and was able to enjoy the flavour of the life of adventure he had craved for, and to look into the bright face of danger. He built for him-

T H E S E A S

self a palace in the wild named Vailima. From Edinburgh came out the familiar furniture he had been brought up among, which had been the stage scenery of his chimney-corner days, when the back bed-room chairs became a ship, and the sofa-back was his hunter's camp. At Vailima he, like Ibsen's Peer Gynt, received "a race gift from his childhood's home." He had in olden times played at being a minister like his grandfather, to wile away a toyless Sunday. When he grew into his unorthodox dark shirt and velvet-jacket stage, he had been a rebellious, rather atheistical youth; but at Samoa, maybe to please his truly good, uncanting mother, or the sight of the belongings from his old home, made him

A C R O S S

bethink himself of his father's reverent conducting of family worship. He would have the same, but set to work and composed prayers for himself. Beautifully worded they are, full of his gospel of kindness and gladness, and he read them with effective fervour in the hall of Vailima, with his be-tartaned servants gathered round. These devotional exercises of his have been quoted by the "unco guid" to make him into what Henley severely styled "a Seraph in Chocolate, a barley-sugar effigy of a real man." The religious faith of Stevenson was the same as Ben Adhem's in Leigh Hunt's poem, who, when he found his name was not among those who loved the Lord, cheerily asked the angel to write him as one

T H E S E A S

who loved his fellow-men.
The heavenly messenger returned

“And showed the names whom love
of God had blessed,”

And “lo ! Ben Adhem’s led all the
rest.”

To Stevenson, throughout his life, all the world was truly a stage. He went gaily along playing his part, and when he came to Samoa, he, on whose brows the dews of youth still sparkled, gleefully revelled in the pomp and circumstance which allow him to make believe he was a chieftain. He could go flower-bedecked and garlanded without comment in among his adopted subjects. He paid deference to Samoan codes of manners, a thing he had scorned to do in his native land.

A C R O S S

All his life he indulged in too few relaxations. The grim Scots divines, whose "damnatory creed" Louis objected to so strongly, in their studies, we read, reserved a corner for rod and gun. In his library there was never a sign of sporting tools, not even a golf-club. He was not effeminate; in fact, if "the man had been dowered with better health, we would have lost the author," says one speaker of him; but he simply never let go the pen, and, doubtless, his singleness of purpose, his want of toil-resting hobbies, was hampering to his health. Walking-tours, during which he was busy all the while taking mental notes for some article, was no brain holiday. In Samoa, he enjoyed the purest of pleasures,

T H E S E A S

gardening. "Nothing is so interesting," he says, in his *Vailima Letters*, "as weeding, clearing, and path-making. It does make you feel so well."

But despite warring with weeds and forest rides, in an enervating country, he wrote persistently through the swooningly hot days of damp heat.

"I have done my fiddling so long under Vesuvius, that I have almost forgotten to play, and can only wait for the eruption and think it long of coming," he wrote; and shortly after, in December 1894, it came and smote him down to the earth with merciful painlessness. His wife, his stepchildren, and his mother were beside him when, at the highest water-mark his craftsmanship had reached, he paid the

A C R O S S

debt to overstrain, and laid him down with a will. The closing act of his life's drama befitted his instinct for effective staging. As he lay shrouded in his nation's flag, the Samoans, who loved him, came to pay their tribute and take farewell of their honey-tongued playmate and counsellor, Tusitala. They counted it an honour to be asked to hew a track through the tropic forest up which they bore him to his chosen resting-place on the mountain top of Vaea, overlooking Vailima. There a table tombstone, like that over the martyrs' graves on the hills of home, marks where this kindly Scot is laid, with the Pacific for ever booming his dirge. Samoa, heretofore, to most was but a speck on a great ocean of another

T H E S E A S

hemisphere. Stevenson transformed it into a "Mecca of the Mind," where pilgrims, bearing his name in remembrance, send their thoughts to do reverence at that shrine where,

"High on his Patmos of the Southern
Seas,
Our Northern dreamer sleeps,"

no longer separated from his own country and kindred by a world of waters, but, as another friend and poet said, divided from us now only by the unbridged river of Death.

Of his writings the list is long and varied, and forms a goodly heritage. Like himself, they are compounded of many parts, for he was essayist, poet, novelist, traveller, moralist, biographer, and historian, and a

A C R O S S

Master of his Tools at all. Beside his own books, through many of which we may make his intimate acquaintance, his letters, and others telling the story of his life, form many volumes. Stevenson advised every one to read often, not only the Waverley Novels, but the biography of good Sir Walter. "His life," he affirmed, "was perhaps more unique than his work," and that remark applies to R. L. S. himself, as well as to his great predecessor. Having burned his immature efforts when he was following his own "private determination to be an author," when ostensibly studying engineering, there are but two pamphlets, printed in his boyhood, which are not written when he had acquired his



FROM PAINTING BY COUNT NERLI

T H E S E A S

finished style. Louis' last creation, Weir of Hermiston, he himself thought was his masterpiece, and he was always his own surest and severest critic. The portrait of the judge on whom he modelled Hermiston, *i. e.*, Braxfield, was not in Stevenson's advocate days bequeathed to the Parliament House, but he had seen it in a Raeburn Exhibition he reviewed. He recollected the outward semblance of the man in his receptive memory till he resurrected Braxfield as Hermiston. The half-told tale is in itself a monument which, unfinished though it be, shows us how clever an artificer Louis had become.

And what manner of man to the outward eye was this gypsily-inclined descendant of

A C R O S S

square-headed Scottish engineers? With his dark eyes looking as if they had drunk in the sunshine in some southern land, his uncut hair, his odd, shabby clothes clinging to his attenuated frame, his elaborate manners and habit of gesticulating as he spoke, he was often mistaken for a starving musician or foreign mountebank. It is not surprising that continental officials doubted his passport's statement that he was a Briton. In France he was imprisoned, and he complains he could not pass a frontier or visit a bank without suspicion. "A slender, boyish presence, with a graceful, somewhat fantastic bearing, and a singular power of attraction in the eyes and a smile were the first things that impressed you," says his bi-

T H E S E A S

ographer. Like his mother, he remained to the end of his life perennially young in appearance and spirits. The burden of years never weighed him down or dimmed his outlook. His face kindled and flushed with pleasure when he heard of a doughty deed, a spice of wit, or some tale to his liking. Few drew him on canvas in his lifetime, though he summered among artists. Sargent, in 1885, did a small full-length portrait of him, which "is said to verge on caricature, and is in Boston. W. B. Richmond, R. A., about the same time, at Bournemouth, began another in oils, not much more than laid in in two sittings." Louis sat to an Italian, Count Nerli, in Samoa; but in this last portrait he looks painfully

A C R O S S

haggard, reminding us of his own words, "the practice of letters is miserably harassing." Because of the too brilliant light elsewhere in Vailima, he was painted in a room which was close, and the air fatigued him. While sitting, he wiled away an hour by making doggerel lines all to rhyme with the artist's name, Nerli. The portrait was bought by a Scotch-woman travelling in New Zealand, where, after the author's death, it had remained unsold. His mother, on returning to Scotland when bereft of her boy, asked to see the picture again. She had disapproved of it in Samoa, as it was over true a likeness, representing him sadly emaciated. Seeing it again, she revoked her former judgment, and wished to pos-

T H E S E A S

sess it, but the purchaser also had grown to prize it. So it hangs in her drawing-room, near by where the Eildons stand sentinel over Scott's resting-place. This picture of him who lies on Vaea's crest looks down with a slightly quizzical expression, as if amused at finding himself ensconced in a place of honour in the house of strangers on Tweedside. Photographs there are in plenty of Stevenson, and one snapshot, enlarged in the Edinburgh Edition, recalls him looking up with "long, hatchet face, black hair, and haunting gaze, that follows as you move about the room." But his likeness was as difficult for the photographer, or the sun, to catch, as for the painter to put on canvas, for the peculiar fasci-

A C R O S S

nation of the living man lay in himself, in the elusive charm of his smile, and in his manner of speech. However, his contemporaries have left their printed records of his appearance and his peculiar personality. Henley's perfect description in verse is too well known to need quotation. Ugly, Stevenson called himself, but this was not so. He was original in looks and mind, his lank brown hair straggled over his high forehead, and framed his thin, high-cheeked, sallow, oval face. His brown eyes and full red lips gave a dash of colour to his features. His schoolmate, Mr. Baildon, says truly, "his eyes were always genial, however gaily the lights danced in them; but about the mouth there was something of

T H E S E A S

trickery and mocking, as of a spirit that had already peeped behind the scenes of Life's pageant, and more than guessed its unrealities."

Repose he never tasted of, for his zest in life, his adventurous inclination to explore, his insatiable curiosity, kept him ever moving at topmost speed. To understand the mainspring which affected the man's character—the machinery that supplied him with an inexhaustible nerve force and vitality—Mr Colvin explains, "besides humour, which kept wholesome laughter always ready at his lips, was a perfectly warm, loyal, and tender heart, which, through all his experiments and agitations, made the law of kindness the one ruling law of his life." He marvelled, on his

A C R O S S

way through the *Pilgrim's Progress*, why the man with the muck-rake grovelled in straws and dust, and never looked up to the glittering crown held out for his acceptance. This mulish blindness puzzled the boy, and when he grew up, he opened the eyes, and illumined by his work and his example the dreary-hearted who wasted their opportunities, not seeing the number of beautiful things which made the world into a royal pleasance. With tune-ful words he persuaded those who plodded with dusty feet along the high-road to pause for a while and saunter among the greener fields of earth, and through the stimulating courage that shone through every chapter he wrote, he, like his sires, "the ready and the strong

T H E S E A S

of word," has, by his works,
left lights to shine upon the
paths of men.

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